

Creating Jobs and Improving Health Care: The Certified Nursing Assistant Training Program

by
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On the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation – which consists of 3.2 million acres in north-central South Dakota – 78% of the Native Americans on the reservation are unemployed. Of those employed, nearly 96% still live below the federal poverty level. Yet even with these realities, the Reservation is building an inter-generational health facility which will offer around-the-clock nursing, assisted living, and day care services to its citizens. With TOP support, the Reservation is launching an ambitious plan to create new jobs by training the unemployed to become the skilled health care employees needed to staff the new facility.

The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Authority, the University of South Dakota, and other community partners are creating an online **Certified Nursing Assistant Training Program** which will be offered



at the Cheyenne River Community Technology Center in Eagle Butte, South Dakota. The initiative will prepare local residents for new careers in health care. Participants will complete secure, web-based online training modules either from their homes or at the local community technology center, resulting in certification as Certified Nursing

Assistants. The health care component of the project is being developed through the University of South Dakota, South Dakota Health Technology Innovations, and the Sioux Valley Hospitals and Health System.

The project is testing a concept that is central to resource-poor rural areas: can web-based distance learning technology effectively cultivate job readiness skills, and, thereby, help address the critical local need for health care workers? Not only will there be a demand for skilled workers at the new inter-generational facility, but other health care facilities in the region have expressed similar needs. This project – in matching training with real employer needs – is a promising model for other communities to create entry level jobs in health care facilities in their own regions.